

THE FOUR STAGES of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) Process

I. The Period of Pre-Catechumenate — a stage where one can hear the gospel proclaimed and reflect on his or her life in the light of the Word of God. It is a time for questions about the church to be asked and answered. For those who already believe in the Gospel of Jesus it is a time to hear the message of faith anew and to move to a deeper level of conversion in mind and heart.

II. The Period of the Catechumenate — Those who profess their faith in Christ and desire to enter the Church become Catechumens (those who are unbaptised) or Candidates for Full Communion (those who were baptised in another tradition). After a rite of welcoming a period of catechesis or teaching takes place. The Catechumens and Candidates experience the spirit, works, prayer, their creed and mission of the community. A person may remain a catechumen or candidate from a few months to a number of years.

III. The Period of Purification & Enlightenment — Catechumens who will be celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter time are given a formal invitation to these Sacraments at the Rite of Election during the first week of Lent. This rite is celebrated at Mary, Queen of the Universe Shrine with the Bishop presiding. The Catechumens at this time become "*The Elect.*" The 40 day period of Lent becomes a time of final preparation. Through the Penitential Rite for Candidates on the 2nd Sunday of Lent and the Rites of Scrutiny for the Elect celebrated on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent, the community prays over the candidates and elect asking God to help them strengthen all that is good and remove all that is harmful or sinful from their lives. By passing on to the Catechumens the practice of faith (the Creed) and its practice of prayer (Lord's Prayer) and by observing the tradition of fasting and works of charity, the

catechumens, candidates and community journey together to Easter when the vows of baptism are made or renewed.

IV. The Sacraments of Initiation — The water of baptism, the sacred chrism of confirmation and participation at the table of the Lord are shared with the Elect at the Easter Vigil. Candidates for full communion in the Roman Catholic Church who were baptised in another denomination, having completed their formation process, make their profession of faith, are confirmed and participate in the Eucharist at this celebration also.

V. The Period of Mystagogy — The 50 days from Easter to Pentecost is a festive season of post-baptismal catechesis. It is a time when the newly baptised and the candidates who have entered into full communion with the Catholic Church deepen their understanding of what it means to be a Eucharistic people. During this season the new Catholic Christians begin to discern how they will share in the mission of the Church through Christian service. The period of Mystagogy is a reminder to everyone that the process of spiritual growth is an ongoing, lifelong task.